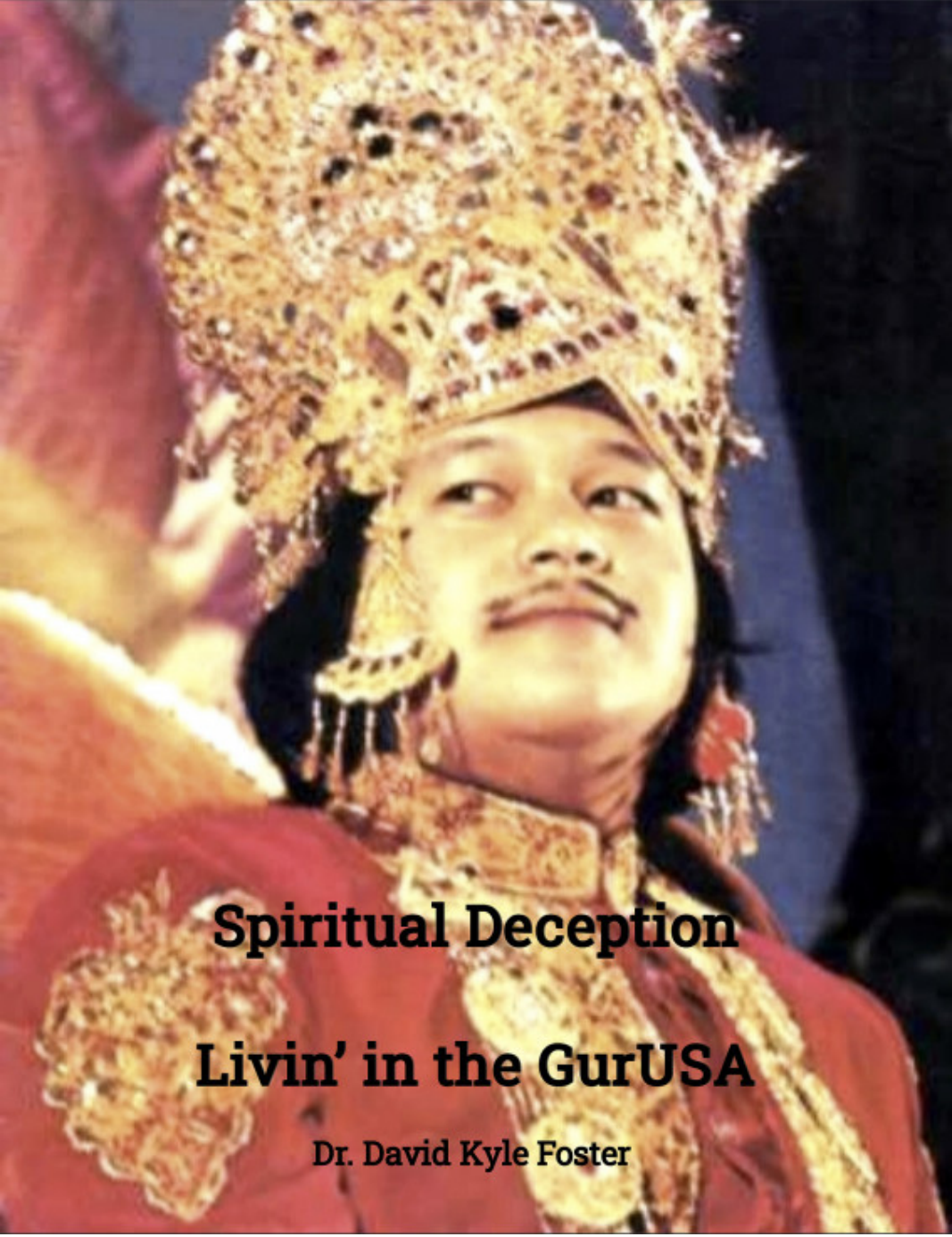

Spiritual Deception

Livin' in the GurUSA

Dr. David Kyle Foster

Spiritual Deception: Livin' in the GurUSA

by David Kyle Foster

An excerpt from *Love Hunger* by David Kyle Foster

It was a night that was impossible to forget. Sitting alone on my bed, legs crossed in the lotus and hands formed in the Gyan Mudra positions, I began to meditate on "Holy Light". By now, I was quite proficient in this technique and could quickly bring to my awareness the light that shown within. It was my favorite of the four techniques of meditation that had been revealed to me by the Guru because it was the most "supernatural" in its effect. I loved to bathe in the light and meditate on the belief that it was the pure essence of God Himself. I had also been taught that it was my purest essence as well, and that the ultimate goal of meditation was to become so one with the light that I would lose my identity and merge into it, thus gaining the consciousness that I was one with it.

Of course, on this night I didn't expect anything different than the normal blissful experience that I had grown use to having during the meditation, but was I ever in for a shock. About 40 minutes into the meditation, I suddenly moved from observer to subject. In other words, I suddenly merged into the light and became one with it. My individual identity ceased and became one with the light. On the one hand, it was a bit frightening to lose my individual identity, yet on the other hand, the experience was one of complete bliss and peace. Without warning or expectation, I had achieved nirvana and was suddenly experiencing the incredible experience of God-consciousness that gurus spent their entire life pursuing. This, of course, was a spiritual deception from the dark side. For even Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14).

A Gathering in Malibu

My close relationship with Jerry, the well-known Malibu playwright, went on for years. In truth, I needed his approval as a father figure. I also treasured the recognition of seeing – and of being seen by – the coterie of genuinely talented people that surrounded him.

When July 1979 came around, the day before my 28th birthday, I called him and asked if I could spend the night on his pool deck. My hunger for love was insatiable and my thirst for spirituality was intensifying. Someone had told me that the "spiritual energies" on that particular day were powerful because of the full moon and some kind of a "spiritual convergence." In my emotional misery, I was trying explore the depths of life since the heights had proven so disappointing. At first, Jerry said no, because he had other plans. But uncharacteristically, I insisted.

While I was there, a Malibu surfer named Don came over to visit. He was a young kid and I assumed that he was another of Jerry's boy lovers. He was very nice and enthusiastic and upbeat - a refreshing change from the jaded Hollywood crowd. He and Jerry were leaving to go see a video about an Indian guru - Maharaj Ji. As an afterthought, Don invited me along, too. I told him I didn't want to go see "no tape about no guru!" Then Jerry mentioned that they were going to Timothy Gallwey's house. That caught my attention. Timothy Gallwey was the author of one of the biggest selling books at the time called *Inner Tennis*. I hadn't even begun to stop chasing the great and the near great, so I went along.

Maybe, I thought, *somebody will make a movie out of Gallwey's book. If I get to know him now, I'll be in a better position to get a part in it later.*

The author's home was in the very exclusive Point Dume area, north of Malibu near Zuma Beach. Tim Gallwey had a sunken living room covered in polar bear rugs and a wife who looked like she'd just stepped out of *Vogue*. Tim was clearly part of the elite Malibu jet-setting world, so I enthusiastically listened to everything he had to say. He talked about his book and his house for a while. Then, gradually, changed the subject to the purpose of life and how important it is to find it.

I was immediately enthralled. I hungered for acceptance, and my dreams of fulfilling that need had been crushed, so by now I knew I

needed something more – something substantial to satiate the yearning that burned inside me. Here I was listening to a man with money, fame, a beautiful wife, a fabulous house, confidently tell me how he found purpose in life. His words were mesmerizing.

Gallwey spoke for about 45 minutes. Then he masterfully eased the direction of his talk toward Guru Maharaj Ji.

All I could remember about Maharaj Ji was that he had been a pudgy little kid who had immigrated to the US from India in the very early 70's when he was 12. But by then he was 21 years old. Eastern mysticism was a hot subject at the time, so he had been on all the talk shows. I'd seen him on the "Merv Griffin Show" that day in the college lounge after trying to commit suicide and then again on the cover of *Life Magazine*.

Gallwey continued to hold us spellbound, relating how Maharaj Ji offered practical experience to people instead of just another set of religious concepts. In retrospect his words were meaningless, but they struck just the right chords in my mind and heart. Then Timothy put in the videotape. For another 20 minutes we heard from Guru Maharaj Ji himself.

I wasn't 100 percent sure about the Guru. But Gallwey had convinced me that there really could be life after Hollywood.

God & the Guru

Love and acceptance. Acceptance and love. These three little words, and the emptiness in my soul that hungered for their satisfaction, had become something of a mantra for me. By the time I first heard about Maharaj Ji, I had given up all hope of finding any sort of emotional fulfillment in Hollywood. But now a new possibility had emerged, and I felt a ripple of hope that there was something for me in this young guru's mystical teachings.

It was clear by then that the entertainment business simply could not

satisfy my deepest needs. Instead, little by little, my focus was shifting from dreams of stardom to an exploration of the supernatural. Surely the Cosmos -- as I had begun to call whatever power existed beyond the material world – could offer meaning and purpose. And if my life became meaningful to the Ultimate Power, surely my need for love and acceptance would be met as well.

At that point, the Protestant denomination I'd grown up with was of no interest to me. In my view, Christianity was a plastic religion, populated by people who were only pretending to have faith. I still respected Jesus, or at least the idea of Him. But my antagonism toward God had increased through the years, and my defenses against Him were rock-hard and unyielding.

I hated the "imaginary" deity of stuffy, uncaring church people. I'd had enough of Him and of His followers. But it was beginning to dawn on me that there might just be another deity out there – someone or something that could actually have benevolent thoughts and plans for me. The idea of an impersonal but Higher Power appealed to me. I envisioned such a pure energy force redeeming my past and transforming all the evil I'd ever done into something meaningful.

After the first meeting at Timothy Gallwey's home, despite his brilliance, I'd been skeptical. But in the days that followed, his words haunted me. I was invited to another similar event and was eager to go. This second meeting was called a *satsang*, a Sanskrit word that identifies a gathering for the purpose of seeking Truth, the Ultimate being, or God.

We found ourselves in Malibu once again, and this time we all removed our shoes before entering the house. As I looked around, the crowd of chic, wealthy searchers impressed me. Their warmth and sincerity melted more of my skepticism. *This isn't a bunch of poor, uneducated people grasping at straws*, I thought to myself. Instead, they seemed to be highly educated and financially sound. One by one, various men and women described how uncertain they'd been about

Maharaj Ji at first, and how wonderful life had become after they'd finally opened their hearts to the love he offered.

Tim Gallwey spoke again. Once more I was enthralled with his enthusiasm. He spoke confidently and rapidly. He spoke of receiving "Knowledge" – with a capital "K" – which becomes available to us when enlightened teachers help us connect our consciousness with the Energy Force we call God. He explained that this Energy Force flows through each of us; it is part of us. It is the Divine within.

After the meeting, I gave a ride to two young guys who lived in one of Maharaj Ji's ashrams. *Ashram*is another Sanskrit word that literally means "to work." An ashram is generally a secluded residence for followers of an eastern guru. It's common among Hindus, and Maharaj Ji, as I came to learn, borrowed liberally from Hinduism and other eastern religions as well as from Christianity. He was from India, but had been raised in a Catholic school there.

I was attracted to one of the guys and thought I'd try to develop a friendship – maybe even more – with him. I also wanted to see what level of poverty they had to live with. When we arrived, I was amazed to find myself inside a beautiful modern house overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It was right below Maharaj Ji's own lavish home, which crowned a nearby hill in Trancas Beach.

I questioned the two disciples about the ashram's prosperous look; I had assumed that austerity would be a necessary part of its existence. They told me that abject poverty was a religious concept that Maharaj Ji simply did not embrace. Instead, he drove a Rolls Royce and taught that possessing material things is not a sin. "Only the attachment to them is wrong," one of the guys explained.

I decided to suspend judgment on that one for the moment.

At the time, I failed to notice that I was repeating the same fantasy I had cherished when I thought Hollywood was my ticket out of the mess I'd made of my life. By the time the guru entered the scene, my

life was in a shambles just as it had been when I left college. My alcohol and drug use was rampant. My dependence on hustling for both income and sexual gratification was increasingly dangerous. I knew I had to make some changes.

My new friends suggested that I travel to Miami the following week to see Maharaj Ji in person. Was he a charismatic teacher of wisdom or a charlatan? I needed to find out.

At first, I was under the impression that I would be traveling to Miami to have a *private* meeting with the Maharaj Ji. However, I was disabused of that notion the minute I entered the convention center. The presence of somewhere around 10,000 frenetic *premies* – "lovers of truth" in Sanskrit – was overwhelming. What energy. What excitement! I was immediately glad I had come.

Hopeful as I was, however, I was still looking for signs of weirdness. Were the participants dressed in strange garb? Did they appear to be brainwashed or on drugs? Were they true believers, or was a shadow of doubt hovering over the room? To my relief, everyone looked absolutely normal.

Before long, there was buzz and excitement and suddenly Maharaj Ji walked onto the stage. In an electrifying moment, the venue exploded into a kind of glee which approached delirium. Arms were raised in exaltation. Cheers and squeals filled the air. This was the last thing I expected. Until then I had only seen relatively serene lecture videos. There was more going on here than uplifting teaching, more than the appearance of a "good" man.

I watched in amazement. *This is new*, I thought. *This is different. This is exciting. Even if he turns out to be a fraud, this is one bizarre trip that I've never taken before*. At the time, I had no idea that the 10,000 people in the Miami Convention Center actually believed that their guru was God Himself.

There are only two reasons people act this way, I counseled myself. *They*

are either brainwashed or they're responding to something genuine, something transformational and fulfilling.

They didn't seem to be brainwashed. So I opened up my spirit to welcome Maharaj Ji in.

After his intriguing lecture, Maharaj Ji sat on that Miami stage for several hours, moving nothing except his head while the faithful paraded in front of him, kissing his feet. As they walked away from him after doing so, the look of bliss on their faces was so obvious that I decided to try it to see if there was something supernatural going on. As I bent down to kiss his feet, I tried to pour out to him every bit of love that I could muster. As I walked away I felt only a subtle vibration, and a vague sense of peace. Left and right, others were losing consciousness all around me. That puzzled me. What about me? I couldn't have known – wouldn't have wanted to know – that the One true God was subtly leading me to Himself along the only path I was willing to follow.

I returned to LA and dove into the Bible for several weeks. Thanks to my limited biblical knowledge, I was easily convinced that Maharaj Ji was, indeed, God-in-the-flesh. Helping me along, of course, were members of his cult, who offered a random collection of convoluted scriptures the guru used to convince people of his authenticity.

I attended satsang almost every night after the Miami trip. I eagerly listened to premies talk at length about their love for Maharaj Ji and what he had done in their lives; they repeatedly spoke about the meaning and purpose he had brought to the world. I was captivated by the notion that, for some strange reason, God had decided to allow me to become a part of something ultimate and cosmic.

What I didn't know and really couldn't have imagined, was that other forces – powerful forces – were at work on my behalf. Of all people, my parents were pouring out their love for me in a most unexpected way.

New Twist: A Family in Prayer

During the late 1970s, my parents had encountered the "Charismatic renewal" in the Presbyterian Church and had experienced a dramatic turnaround in their lives. As they described it, “Our faith became deeper and more substantive and God more real in our lives." They believed that the Holy Spirit had come into them in a new way, and their faith had become something tangible and vital, as opposed to something academic and peripheral to everyday life. At the time I didn't realize exactly what had happened. Instead, in my letters, I tried to convince them that they needed Guru Maharaj Ji.

Unbeknownst to me, however, Mom and Dad’s belief in the authority of the Bible had dramatically increased. Their network of friends had blossomed beyond the nominal “mainline” Presbyterian crowd to include serious believers and prayer warriors who were serving God all over the world. And they were all praying for me.

When I wrote to my parents about the Guru, my words deeply troubled them, more intensely so than I might have imagined before. They knew very well that I was being deceived and they feared that I would be lost to the true God forever. Today, as I read the letters I wrote to them at that time, I am sobered by how dangerously deceived and lost I really was.

In a letter to my parents dated September 6th, 1979 I wrote, “Maharaj Ji is the Lord – please believe it! He has heard my cries for help and has come to make me a devotee of him.”

Later I wrote,

The only clue we have to finding God is through our hearts, because that is where truth lies. There we can find Him.

My recognition of who Maharaj Ji is was immediate. My heart told me right away. It was my mind that kept me from true devotion for all this time.

Stop listening to your minds and you will see that he is the Lord – you will see with your heart – not your mind.

Only in my letters did I try to convert my parents. I was afraid to talk to them on the phone or in person about the Guru. In my memory, they had always denigrated my hopes and dreams, criticized my interests or tried to talk me out of them. That is why I had never shared with them my dreams for Hollywood. And now what was happening between me and my Guru was way too precious to argue about. I was unwilling to receive their criticism in any form other than in a letter that could easily be thrown away.

Meanwhile, I was tireless in my efforts to convince them of my newfound faith. Many of those letters to my parents were 10 to 15 pages long. Only my concern for their salvation prodded me to slowly and gently reveal to them that God was on the planet! As it turned out, they already knew more about God's presence among us than I did. Still I wrote, "Your mind, your ego, your imagination is deceiving you into thinking that Maharaj Ji is not the Holy Spirit. That is its job, its purpose. Feel from the heart – that is where truth lies, not in the mind."

Later, after a supernatural experience, I wrote to them,

I'm no longer the impetuous little kid that you remember who ran off and dove into things without thinking. Remember I've been living in the unreal world of Los Angeles for six years now – have a college degree – and can safely say that I'm no fool. I have checked out every angle on this thing.

Last Saturday I received "Knowledge". There is now no longer anything of this world that can touch me as long as I use the tools of "Knowledge" given to me by God. It is absolutely forbidden by God for one who has received this precious "Knowledge" to reveal it to anyone. Only God Himself can do that and only through Guru Maharaj Ji.

When "Knowledge" was revealed to me I saw just who Maharaj Ji was.

The first thing I saw was light – incredible light, that which would power 10,000 suns. I saw this inside of me. In fact, I can close my eyes right now and see it shining. It is the very essence of God. It is God. It is Jesus. It is Maharaj Ji. They are all one.

Also I was revealed the music of God. I could, and can, hear celestial music inside myself.

In addition, I was given the taste of nectar, which is God. And I was revealed the Holy Name – that unspeakable name that is God. Maharaj Ji tells us that unless we are constantly in the remembrance of Holy Name, when the time comes for the passing from this life, we will not be saved. So we must constantly be in God consciousness to be saved because our time will come like a thief in the night. And so my effort must constantly be there. Having "Knowledge" revealed to me alone will not save me. It is my true effort through "Knowledge" that I will be saved.

An Exquisite Experience

One of the factors that contributed to my deception was the supernatural element empowering the Guru, which I had not experienced in a direct way since my twelfth year, when I had sensed Jesus' presence in my father's church during "O Holy Night." I was very unfamiliar with the spirit realm; I was even more unaware of Satan's power to deceive. Like so many others, I naively assumed that if something was supernatural, it had to be from God.

So, for example, when I found myself weeping uncontrollably during the Guru's teachings, I assumed that God was responding to my unspoken, inner request for mercy and reconciliation, and that He was doing something beyond my understanding. Indeed, in spite of all the fallacies involved, I had begun to believe that notwithstanding the virulent hatred I'd had of Him for most of my life, and despite my personal wickedness, He was still willing to forgive me and to have me as one of His children. To have this hope revived after it had been utterly forsaken for so many years stimulated a rising tide of emotion. And although I was feeling these emotions under false pretenses, my

impression was true. God really was wooing me to Himself.

All the while, I was intent on confirming that Guru Maharaj Ji was an incarnation of God Himself. That was a key element in his teaching -- that in every generation there is an incarnation of God on this earth, called a "Perfect Master." And since he had arrived to usher in the final age of mankind, he had come with more power than anyone else before. I had long carried within my heart the belief that my generation was the final age of humanity so I was eager to believe the Guru's claims. I just needed supernatural proof.

One night I knelt on the floor. I was surrounded by dozens of other premies who were likewise bowing to the floor in worship of Guru Maharaj Ji. We were doing pranam, which means bowing down -- literally face down, prostrate. And my prayer was sincere. I told God that I believed in His Son Jesus and asked Him to forgive me, to save me and to show me if Maharaj Ji was really Him or not.

All at once, I felt that a door to my heart had been opened like a camera aperture, and an enormous torrent of pure energy rushed into my heart through the opening. Liquid love was being poured through me with such force that it seemed as if I was lying at the bottom of Niagara Falls with the full force of the water rushing towards me. I felt both exhilarated and terrified at the same time.

Curiously, however, the torrent poured into an invisible, other-dimensional place in my heart rather than hitting me physically. And it sounded simultaneously like a mighty rushing wind, like millions of voices, and like a blast from a hurricane-force storm. It was unquestionably the most exquisite experience of my lifetime, as well as the most intensely frightening and powerful feeling I'd ever known. It was pure, furious love. But I knew that it would kill me if it continued, so in my spirit, I shouted, "Stop!" and it instantly stopped.

My first thought was, *Wow! God! You do exist!*

My next thought was, *But was that meant to show me that the Guru*

really is You or that You are something completely different? Was it a response to my willingness to follow Maharaj Ji or a response to my trust in Jesus Christ?

I still wasn't so sure about the Guru. But one thing I *was* sure of – after years of denial – was that God was powerful and that He loved me very much. The partition between God and me had been consumed by His love for me. The angry barrier between us was no longer there. I would never, *ever* be able to doubt God's power nor His love again.

At the same time, I was increasingly unsure that Guru Maharaj Ji was who he claimed to be.

After the spiritual Niagara had nearly drowned me, I looked around to see if anyone else in the room had felt the same thing. Those around me were serenely bowed in veneration and clearly clueless about what I had just experienced. I was dying to tell them, but at the same time realized that there was no way I was going to get anyone to believe what had just happened.

But maybe Tim Gallwey will get it, I thought.

I walked out the front door and sat on the low brick wall that bordered the walkway, waiting for him to emerge. Almost as if on cue, with most of the people still inside, Tim emerged from the house. He walked toward me and asked me how I was doing.

"I've got to tell you what has just happened to me!" I exclaimed fervently, trying my best not to sound like a complete fanatic.

"Please, do tell me," he calmly replied, cool as ever.

I tried to find the words I needed to describe the experience. "Okay… so while we were doing pranam just now, it was as if a door in my chest opened up and a rushing force of energy poured into my heart! What was that?"

Knowing of my Christian upbringing, Tim replied, "That was the river

of living water. In the book of John, Jesus promised to give it to everyone who was thirsty. You have been thirsty haven't you?"

"Well, yeah!" I replied.

"And you have been wondering whether or not Maharaj Ji is God, haven't you."

"Yeah, I have."

"God had chosen this way to answer your prayers. He has shown you that Guru Maharaj Ji offers you the experience of God that you have been looking for. It is through him that you will receive the eternal life you've been seeking. He has filled you with the living water of Jesus Christ. He has filled you with his living water -- the water that he gave to Jesus to pour out on all who would follow the One True God."

I went home that night and looked up all the scriptures that spoke of the river of living water that Jesus Christ had promised. That was all I needed. From that point on, as far as I was concerned, Guru Maharaj Ji was God the Father Himself, and I was the Guru's – lock, stock and barrel.

"In Your Mind or in Your Heart?"

One of the reasons I was vulnerable to supernatural phenomena was because of Maharaj Ji's earliest conditioning: He insisted that questioning and doubting him was wrong; it was a sure sign that you were "in your mind" rather than "in your heart." As devotees, we were conditioned not to think, but simply to feel. Eventually we lost the ability to discern counterfeit feelings from authentic experiences. And before long we willingly opened our minds to demonic influences.

To this day, I am shocked that I was so willing to blindly follow a spiritual leader based on the disengagement of the mind. As a

romantic, I found the idea very attractive that truth can only be perceived by the heart. In retrospect, I wish that someone had shown me Jesus' words from Mark 7:21-23, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Or Jeremiah's declaration in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick: who can understand it?"

Another element that assisted in our conditioning was the diet we were required to follow. We were to be strict and total vegetarians, meaning no meat, fish or eggs, nor anything that contained those things, including cake mixes (eggs), and other packaged goods. It was difficult, however, to figure out how to adhere to such a diet, and many premies became anemic and hypoglycemic from getting too little protein and too many carbohydrates

My parents were, of course, gripped with fear during that period of time. It was obvious to them that I was being deceived. When I wrote to them about seeing light emanating from Guru Maharaj Ji, they responding by pointing out that the Bible clearly says in 2 Corinthians 11:13 and 14, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds." I didn't know enough about the Bible to understand that when Jesus said in John 8:12 and John 9:5 "I am the light of the world" He was providing a metaphor to help explain His message. He did not mean that He was literally a light inside that could be accessed by meditation.

Mom and Dad wrote letter after letter to me, trying to convince me that Jesus was the only way. I responded with letter after letter to them, assuring them that they only had part of the picture and that Guru Maharaj Ji had the rest. I spun every scripture I could find,

making venerable passages of God's Word sound like they referred to Maharaj Ji. I fed my family massive doses of re-interpreted and misdirected quotes. Meanwhile, my childhood belief in the spiritual bankruptcy of my parents became a shield against much of what they wrote.

What I didn't know was that my parents had organized prayer meetings in their church family, specifically praying that God would bring me out of the cult. It amazed me when I finally heard about the long hours of tears and suffering they'd undergone on my behalf. It was a heartbreaking time for them. On one occasion, my mother was laying on the beach crying out to God for my soul. Suddenly, she heard a voice from heaven saying, "Trust Me!" and in a brief vision saw me preaching from a pulpit. She thought she had been trusting God, but when she saw the vision, she knew that she had been trying to force God into doing something He already wanted to do. It was at that point that she truly released me into His hands.

Yet because I was unaware of the change that had taken place in their hearts, I treated their claims of concern with sarcasm and disbelief – as if it were too little too late. Now as I look back on it I am forever grateful to God for giving me the parents that He did. They are with Him now, but I continue to love them dearly.

His Big Mistake

Maharaj Ji was usually careful to speak respectfully of Jesus. After all, the two of them were one and the same, or so he led us to believe. In the process, he cleverly twisted and turned around what Jesus said to fit whatever the cult was teaching. This was relatively easy to do since people in the cult with Christian backgrounds only had a surface knowledge of the Bible anyway. No one had been a Bible scholar, for example, or even a Bible college student, as far as I knew. We were all simply disaffected "Christians" from nominal, mostly mainline denominational backgrounds. And we shared one reason or another for not wanting the traditional interpretation of the Bible to be true.

There were also a lot of Jews in the cult, looking for their Messiah.

Then one day Maharaj Ji denied what Jesus Christ said He came to do. On Christmas Day, 1979, he said that the only reason that Christ died on the cross was to get people's attention. When Maharaj Ji said those words, something inside of me felt like it was jumping to its feet, crying, "No!" I could feel physical reverberations of the cry echoing across the expanse of space and time.

How completely unexpected this was. I remember wondering what that cry was all about, what spirit had done it, and what it meant with regard to my weakening belief that Maharaj Ji was God. Because of my “river of living water” experience, I had come to believe that God resided within me and this “voice” confirmed to me that I was right. So now I had to decide if the spirit that cried "No!" was the real Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, or some deceiving entity trying to confuse me and rob me of the true reincarnation of Jesus - Maharaj Ji.

It certainly got my attention, sending me on a further search for answers.

Due to my consistent and absolute devotion to Maharaj Ji, in less than a year I was placed in a position of secrecy and trust. That trust meant I had access to information that was damaging to the group. I was now working in the main office in LA and had occasion to see what was going on behind the scenes. Some of it wasn’t pretty.

I’ll never forget the day I sat in the office with the girl who did the books. I heard her ask her supervisor which set of books a particular source of income belonged in – the set shown to the IRS or the set that revealed the cult’s real income. I asked her about it and she made a joke about how we had to keep two sets of books in order to avoid trouble from the government.

On another occasion I was present at a group meeting of leaders where they gloated over a coup that they’d just pulled off with the local PTA. The cult owned an old movie theater, where they showed

family-style movies to the public on weekends. I had served as an usher and ticket taker on many occasions. After a while we found out that neighborhood parents had banded together to keep their kids from going to the theater because it was being run by the cult. They didn't want their money supporting the guru and they didn't want their children seduced into the cult by the devotees who ran the theater.

In response, several cult members decided to dress up in business attire, and to attend the local PTA meeting pretending to be businessmen who had just bought the theater from the cult. They assured the parents that it was now safe to send their kids there. This scam worked like a charm.

These two incidents caused me great distress. Why would Maharaj Ji have to cheat the government and lie to parents over money concerns? Wasn't he God? If so, he could create any kind of income he needed. Additionally, if he really was God, why would he lie? Shouldn't he be perfect and therefore incapable of lying?

I still remembered the time he'd cynically spoken about Christ's death on the cross and referred to it as a publicity stunt. A conflict arose inside me, with Maharaj Ji on one side and logic and respect for Jesus on the other.

Meanwhile my parents continued to pray for me. And they weren't the only ones. I had taken a job to get out of debt and a born-again Christian co-worker named Jeff had been confronting me every day about my involvement in the group. He had repeatedly angered me with his insistence that I was following a false prophet, and had been leaving scriptures on my desk every day.

Coming Out

What was going on in the unseen world of prayerful intercession for my deliverance was beginning to take effect. Gradually my confidence in Maharaj Ji was being eroded. One issue that grated on me was his

repeated reference to John the Baptist as “the man who wrote the gospel of John.” Normally, a nominal Christian like me would never have noticed this error; it was only by God's grace that I did. He only did it three or four times, but every once in a while, in the middle of giving satsang, he would refer to John the Baptist in this erroneous way.

It was so obviously wrong that at first I assumed he was joking with us. And in fact, whenever Maharaj Ji said or did something that seemed inconsistent with the cult’s teachings, leaders would always dismiss it as Maharaj Ji “playing with our minds.” If something seemed questionable, leaders would accuse us of "being in your mind" if we brought it up. We were supposed to operate in the continual supernatural consciousness of Maharaj Ji, which was just the opposite of trying to think things through rationally. It was a very clever ruse to cut off contradictions, complaints and the questioning of leadership.

As little as I knew about the Bible I did know that John the Baptist couldn’t have written the gospel of John because he had been beheaded by Herod years before many of the events that were described in the gospel took place. *If Guru Maharaj Ji is God*, I asked myself, *then how can he be so wrong about this? In fact, how could he be wrong about anything?*

I began to consider something new and shocking: Was the real God causing Maharaj Ji to make these statements so I could see he was actually a fraud?

What I didn’t know was that in addition to the regular prayer meeting my parents were organizing for me, Jeff, from the office, had persuaded his Bible study buddies to pray for my deliverance as well. Around 30 of them met at the leader's house, and after the study, they shared prayer requests, with at least one person praying for each request. When it came Jeff's turn, he would report incidents that had happened at work and he asked for prayer for me. He also sought the necessary wisdom and guidance to refute my claims.

Jeff and I shared a two-room office space with a copier in a third room. I liked Jeff from the start. We worked together as office assistants, making copies of contracts along with opening, sorting and delivering mail. At some point in the day, when there was a lull, Jeff would come in my room with his Bible. *Oh, no, here it comes again,* I'd silently groan. He'd try to show me a passage in the Bible that spoke to the issue of false prophets and messiahs, and I would quickly dismiss his claims with well-honed cult rhetoric. Before it was over, I might swear at him, or treat him disrespectfully.

Still, he'd soon be back in the room sharing another passage of scripture with me, even though I'd been completely dismissive and insulting just minutes before. After this went on for a number of months, I realized that his affection for me was unconditional, and that no matter how badly I treated him, he continued to care about me and my future. That was disarming. It was also very attractive.

I hated to admit it, but it was something I had been looking for my whole life.

And here's an irony: one of the primary reasons I increasingly abused Jeff was because he was beginning to make sense. I was gradually facing the possibility that I might have been wrong all along. I was potentially facing a humiliating retraction of the Guru's claims, which intensified my anger and anxiety. To Jeff it appeared as though I was drifting farther away from the truth. In fact, I was getting closer to believing his words with every passing day.

In May of 1980, I decided to stop meditating for awhile. I needed to clear my mind of doubts about the Guru. I had secretly begun to read my Bible again – a practice frowned upon in the ashram – so I read it late at night under my blanket or while my roommate was at work. One day while I was reading, the words shot out at me, almost as if they leapt from the page, and I suddenly had an understanding of scripture that I'd never had before. It was as if a spiritual veil was being lifted. I was instantly able to understand scriptural warnings

about people like Maharaj Ji and to discern his methods of deception.

2nd Corinthians 11:14 literally screamed at me once again: "…. even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness…."

I had also become quite fond of the Gospel of John because it was mystical and a better fit with my homemade brew of religious philosophy. John 8:12 : "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

John 8:24: "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." (NIV84)

Matthew 24:4-5, 23-25: "And Jesus answered them, 'See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Christ," and they will lead many astray. . . . Then if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "There he is!" do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.'"

2 Timothy 3:16 had particular impact because it went directly against cult claims that the scripture was unnecessary and not the direct word of God to us, as Maharaj Ji claimed to be. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

When we meditated in our rooms at night, we used a stick to prop up a sheet or blanket over our heads, making a sort of personal mini-tent. My roommate was on a mattress just feet away, and we were supposed to be meditating at the same time. I'd have a small Bible and

flashlight under the tent with me, so I could read the Bible instead of meditating. After my roommate had gone to sleep, I'd lie down, pull the blanket up over my head, pretend to sleep but continue to read underneath the blanket with a flashlight.

One night my roommate caught me reading the Bible. "Why are you doing that?" he asked.

"I'm just confirming Maharaj Ji's teachings by comparing them to it."

"That's not right! You're just 'in your mind.' Otherwise you wouldn't have to confirm anything Maharaj Ji says."

By then I was pretty sure that if Maharaj Ji really was God, the Bible would only confirm what he taught. So why the pressure not to read it? It was all beginning to seem rather suspicious to me.

Still I was afraid to do anything. I'd worked very hard to attain the position of trust the cult had put me in. To make matters worse, the penalty for rejecting the Perfect Master of the Universe was eternal damnation. Needless to say, I had to be absolutely sure of what I was doing before I left. And at the same time, months and months of conditioning could not be shaken off in a moment. I had invested so much devotion and dedication to Maharaj Ji that to even consider that he was not who he claimed to be frightened me. Nonetheless, I had to find out the absolute truth. I had to be completely certain.

In my earnest search through the pages of the Bible, I had discovered a wonderful promise in Jeremiah 29:13, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart."

Could it be true? To find out, I decided to take God at His word, to travel to Israel, and to make a personal pilgrimage in search of Him. At the same time, I sensed that getting away from the cult would allow me to think things through without distraction. I wanted to reconsider everything. And I needed breathing room – space from those who so adamantly rejected the Bible and discouraged my

intellectual concerns. I'd been in the Guru's world long enough. Now I needed to spend some time in the world Jesus knew.

A Personal Pilgrimage to The Promised Land

So often when I'd flown before, I'd watched clouds passing majestically below the aircraft. But this time I fixed my eyes on the Mediterranean Sea. And once I could see a landmass slowly becoming visible on the horizon, a thrilling surge ran through me. I was about to set foot in the Land of Israel, The Holy Land, the place of Jesus' birth, ministry, death and resurrection.

It was hardly a short flight - seventeen hours – and most of it I'd spent sleeping. But as the destination approached, I had watched in growing excitement. Could this journey finally lead me to the Truth?

My devotion to Guru Maharaj Ji was still strong, but my doubts had grown. In spite of the constant pressure to base my faith in the Guru on feelings and not logic or thinking, I'd found that to be impossible. I knew I had to have assurance on the intellectual level and not just warm emotions in my heart. If the Guru was God incarnate as he claimed, I would gladly follow him, but I had to know it, not just feel it.

When I'd joined the cult, I had given up all my possessions except for a TWA credit card - an odd thing to keep at the time. But when I inquired about the ticket to Israel, I'd found that a round trip ticket to Tel Aviv was exactly the same dollar amount as the credit limit on my card. Did that mean that God's hand was directing me? I was becoming more and more convinced that He was.

Guru Maharaj Ji had a convention scheduled in Rome, and the flight to Tel Aviv stopped in Rome first, so suspicions were not aroused at my departure. As far as the other cult members knew, I was going to the convention in Rome, as many of them were. Unbeknownst to them, I wouldn't be joining them there, however; I was bound for the Holy Land.

I can still remember the surge of excitement as the airplane made its descent into Ben Gurion airport. My euphoria temporarily dissolved as we left the plane, however. It was 1980, and the Israel Defense Forces were on high alert. Security officers flanked the door of the aircraft with drawn pistols, and at the bottom of the stairs they stood on guard with Uzi automatic weapons. Momentarily I was afraid, but before long my fear was transformed into a sense of security.

We took a bus from the airport into Tel Aviv. Along the way I saw scores of jeeps, crammed with alert soldiers who were keeping an eye on everything and everybody. They seemed very polite and even friendly, but it was clear that they could mow us down on the spot, if necessary.

Once in Tel Aviv I took a room at the Moss Hotel, just a block from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Excited as I was to be in the Holy land, the trip had exhausted me. As I finally collapsed on the bed, I could hear young Israelis in the street below talking loudly to each other in their rapid-fire Hebrew. A half moon hung above the Mediterranean, and as I stretched out and drifted off into a much-needed sleep, somewhere in the distance I could hear singing.

The next day, I began a bus tour, which seemed like the best way to see Israel, considering how little money I had. It was a student tour arranged by UCLA. I wanted it that way – no Christians trying to convert me – just my searching heart and the God who said He would reveal Himself to me. We traveled south, through Southern Judean farmland. From time to time we saw Bedouin Arabs together with their black tents and flocks of sheep, garbed in flowing robes and headgear. Alongside a few grazing camels, I spotted a spectacular burst of color – a field of Israeli sunflowers.

Already, I was learning more than I'd expected.

As we made our way past an Israeli military base – neat rows of tents and jeeps, with the blue and white Star of David flag of Israel

snapping in the wind high above – our guide pointed out where the PLO had kidnapped and murdered an Israeli boy just a few days earlier. It had happened in an ordinary intersection, an incongruous setting for such a dramatic incident.

Slowly the terrain changed to desert, and before long we approached Beer Sheva. I remembered the name Beer Sheva from a Sunday School lesson I'd had as a child. It was the place where Abraham had made a peace agreement with the Philistine king Abimalech. The Hebrew name Beer Sheva literally means "Well Seven." Abraham had dug a well, and Abimalech's warriors had seized it. Later, both groups had taken an oath of peace and Abraham had offered seven ewe lambs to Abimalech to seal their agreement.

As our bus roared through that desert town, a young Israeli boy – carrying his schoolbooks and wearing a yarmulke – waved heartily as if to greet us. He was about twelve years old and his simple gesture made me feel very welcome. I turned to watch him as we drove away and he continued walking along the street. All at once, I remembered the boy our tour guide had mentioned – he had been kidnapped and killed in a nearby town. Had he been a boy much like this one?

Did the boy who was murdered by the terrorists have a happy personality too? I thought of his age, and how little of the world he had probably seen.

But never mind his age. Why does Satan so zealously attack the innocent? And what about me? As I reflected on these things, I began to understand that perhaps God had not caused the pain and rejection in my past. All along I had blamed Him, cursed Him, defied and disobeyed Him. Yet He had relentlessly pursued me with love, even when I least deserved it. Maybe it was God's Enemy – and mine – that had done me so much harm.

We stopped at the ruins of Avdat, a town dating back to Jesus' day. I was aware that it was the location where the producers of the film "Jesus Christ Superstar" had done some of their filming. We were able

to explore the ruins and observe an ongoing archeological dig. Our guide informed us that Avdat had been an ancient Nabatean city, a trading crossroads for caravans coming from Africa and Arabia on their way to Judea and Rome. It had also been a Roman outpost in the third century and a magnificent city in the sixth. Later, as Byzantine power declined in the seventh century, Moslems had destroyed Avdat.

For some reason, the site made me think of my parents' longstanding religious traditions. Their beliefs and behaviors had been constructed in bygone days, and although they'd never questioned their own upbringing, my own childhood had been rife with heartache and bitterness because of their unbending views. Now here was a city, long deserted and in crumbled ruins. Like my parents' traditions, it hadn't been able to survive the changing eras, and thus had ended in calamity.

Did that mean my life would remain in ruins, too? Could my relationship with my parents change? What would rebuilding a relationship with Mom and Dad require of me?

On the second day we drove the length of the Sinai Peninsula to Sha'arm El Sheik. The Sinai had previously belonged to Egypt, but Israel had conquered and taken possession of it during the 1967 Six Day War. Israel was gradually returning it to Egypt as agreed upon by peace treaties, but in the mean time, Israelis and other tourists enjoyed its many attractions.

The coastline became more and more spectacular the further we went. Saudi Arabia now lay on the opposite shore. Along the way we got to see the wasteland that Moses and the children of Israel traversed for forty years. Wandering around in such a wilderness for that prolonged period seemed unimaginable. Then I remembered the reason for their plight: sin and disbelief. God had caused them to wander until the entire generation that distrusted God had died, except for Caleb and Joshua.

Sounds familiar, I thought. I had also rejected God, and had wandered

in an emotional desert, hungering and thirsting for love and acceptance. Was God beginning to remove the obstacles – my own version of the golden calf – that had kept me away from Him for so long?

Sunday night we spent at Arad and at 3:30 Monday morning we awakened and got underway early so we could watch the sunrise from Masada. It was a beautiful shade of orange, rising from behind the Jordanian mountains over the Dead Sea. And as the day brightened, we slowly made our way up the steep "snake pass" to the top of Masada. The climb was well worth the trek. The view was breathtaking.

Our Jewish guide gave us a stirring account of the fortress's history. Surrounded by Roman armies, knowing that capture meant slavery for the men, and sexual abuse for the women and children, their leader, Elazar ben Yair, convinced them that capture was not an option. As a community, the Jews chose suicide rather than slavery. When the Romans finally mounted the ramp they had constructed, they found the rebels dead. Our guide emphasized that today's Israelis look upon Masada as a powerfully symbolic site. They vow that it will never fall again, just as the Land of Israel will never surrender to their Arab enemies.

I was awestruck at the courage those Jewish heroes displayed in the face of such a hopeless situation. Then it occurred to me – hadn't Jesus said something to His disciples about being willing to die? I'd seen enough of my own captivity to drugs, sex and star-chasing to realize that dying to myself and choosing freedom was a worthy alternative – but one I had yet to pursue.

After a swim in the healing waters of the Dead Sea, we stopped for the night. The next day we would head north, to the Golan Heights and – at last – to Galilee.

In the Footsteps of Jesus

Days later, as we rounded a mountain pass – the Sea of Galilee suddenly appeared, far below. For a few moments, I found myself on the verge of tears. We stopped along the lakeside, at a spot where Jesus is believed to have told His disciples of His impending death. Was I actually standing on the same ground where Jesus stood? It was a phenomenal possibility. Awe-inspiring, to put it mildly.

Our guide was not a Christian believer, and I was disappointed at times in his disinterest and even slightly mocking tone. But as the bus drove down the Galilean road, I thought about how I, too, had dismissed Christianity, and with equal disdain. I'd somehow managed to hold a negative view of Christianity as a religion of fakes and hypocrites, while I lived a life of utter depravity. Yet Christianity was, in essence, the faith of those who were *trying* to live in accordance with God's law and Christ's message, while counting on His grace and mercy. Very few fully succeeded. In fact, Jesus Himself was the only one in history who actually lived a life of perfect righteousness.

We drove by the Mount of the Beatitudes to visit Peter's house in Capernaum, which is adjacent to a synagogue where Jesus taught. Later the rest of the group went swimming in the Sea of Galilee but I stayed on shore. I found a secluded spot, and sat with my arms wrapped around my knees, staring across the lake. It was my hope that Jesus would come walking across the water to tell me whether Maharaj Ji was really divine or not. I wanted an answer, but all I could hear were the waves lapping against the shores, the wind rustling trees, a few birds singing nearby and the tour group laughing and splashing in the water. I closed my eyes and tried to feel Jesus' presence. I tried to focus, sending my desire for an answer to Him through the force of my concentration, but all I could feel was the warm wind moving across my back and hair.

The next day we entered Jerusalem by the Jaffa Gate and walked amidst the colorful merchandise along David Street. It was a very narrow pathway with wall-to-wall shops. As we arrived at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher my emotions welled up at the significance of

where I was. I felt an encounter with the Living God was surely near. Inside I visited the various Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Roman Catholic altars, including the slab of stone they said Christ had been laid on after His crucifixion. Upstairs there were two main altars – one where Christ had been nailed to the cross and another at the spot where the cross had stood when He was crucified.

Despite my anger about the merchandizing of these holy sites, I felt a deep sense of reverence at that second altar and I reached out with my spirit to try to touch Him in His pain. Later on, I looked at the stones – some fine marble, some common – that surrounded me in the church announcing to the world that the Son of Man who once had died was no longer in the tomb. All my life, I had been offended by the seemingly phony ritualism all around me. And it occurred to me that I had allowed the phony trappings that surrounded Christianity to keep me from the very real Savior. My self-righteous preoccupation with judging the false had itself kept Him hidden from my sight. I wanted that to end.

The next morning, with a sense of exhilaration, I set out to visit the Mount of Olives. At the top of the hill, I looked across a broad panorama of the Old City – the Dome of the Rock, the many mosques, church spires, and the restoration that was still taking place in the Jewish Quarter.

As my tour had ended the day before, I tried to stay close to an English-speaking guide, so I could learn the history of what I was seeing. Fortunately, no one seemed to notice that I wasn't a paid tour member. I followed the group down to a church built on the site where Christ was supposed to have wept over Jerusalem before making His entrance into the city, and I took a self-timed picture of myself with the city behind me. The tour guide then stopped to read the passages from Luke's gospel describing the long-ago scene, and as he read the words from his Bible, I was startled to hear Jesus saying them in my spirit as well. Didn't see that coming! Instantly, I realized that the Bible was *literally* the Word of God - words spoken by an

eternal God and therefore words that are eternally being spoken!

This was a paradigm-shattering moment for me. If every word in the Bible is truly "God-breathed" as it says in 2 Timothy 3:16 and "spoken from God and carried along by the Holy Spirit" as 2 Peter 1:21 claims, then knowing God and knowing His will can be infinitely more plain and simple than I'd ever imagined; then Jesus' citing of Deuteronomy 8:3 in Matthew 4:4 sums up the whole matter: "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." If I could learn God's Word well, I would then have an objective way to test the voices, experiences and teachings of those who would claim to speak for God. This was indeed big news and I was left wondering, *Why has no one ever told me this before?*

I followed the group down to the Garden of Gethsemane, and what a beautiful sight it was. Some of the huge, weathered olive trees are thought to be 2,000 years old. Were they the very ones Jesus had walked among? They seemed to have been well tended for centuries and were a pleasant change from the mostly barren Mount of Olives, which serves as a vast cemetery.

A Gethsemane Encounter

The Church of All Nations was built in the Garden of Gethsemane around a white section of rock believed to be the place where Jesus prayed on the night He was betrayed and arrested. The rock rises up through the floor of the church so that visitors can kneel and pray at its edge. As the tour guide read the very prayer that Christ prayed – probably close to that very same spot, I was profoundly moved.

By now, a real battle between my devotion to Guru Maharaj Ji and my belief in Jesus was being waged inside me. The Guru spoke respectfully of Jesus most of the time, but insisted that Jesus was simply another embodiment of God. The Guru, on the other hand, was the ultimate manifestation. I had been taught as a child that Jesus claimed to be the only way to God. Who was right? Was the Guru right and organized Christianity was simply getting Jesus' message

wrong? Did Jesus really mean that He alone was the way to the Father? And if so, didn't that mean the Guru was a fraud?

I had always respected Jesus, but I wasn't completely sure that He was what Christianity taught He was. My knuckles whitened as I grasped my hands firmly together in front of me. I reminded Jesus that I believed in Him. I told him once again that I was sorry for my sins and reminded Him that I had come all the way to Israel to make sure that by following Maharaj Ji, I was indeed following Jesus.

I'd hoped for some miraculous sign, but by then I had come to realize that since Satan could appear as an angel of light, he could just as easily masquerade as Jesus. He could have come walking toward me on the Sea of Galilee, and I would have been misled. I suddenly understood that finding the answer to my question would take more than a miracle. But what could that be?

As I knelt in prayer, straining with hope that God would give me the answer, I said, "God, you can do miracles and Satan can do miracles. So how am I supposed to know who is truly from God?" I was surprised that a reply came so quickly into my mind – a thought so abstract that it could never have been my own:

Who proved His love for you?

At first the thought didn't make sense to me. As I struggled to understand, the image of Christ's scourging and torturous crucifixion flashed through my brain. In fact, I had just visited the very places where those things had taken place. Yes, Jesus had demonstrated His love for me in a very practical way by enduring that long, agonizing death to pay for my sins.

Then I began to consider Maharaj Ji. He had certainly made me *feel* loved at times. But as I tried to remember practical demonstrations of Maharaj Ji's love, nothing came to mind. In fact the only thing he ever did in practical terms was to take from us. He took our time, our money, our belongings, our service, and even our minds.

The Guru took. Jesus, the Savior, gave.

It was so simple. And so marvelous. Why hadn't I thought of it before? Jesus alone had practically demonstrated and thereby proven His love for me. And He had risen from the dead to prove that He was powerful enough to save me, too.

I rose up from that rock feeling feather-light, as if the heaviness of the world had been lifted from my shoulders. A veil of deception had been removed from my mind. I had received my answer at last, and the answer was Jesus.

Joyous and free, I hurried back toward my hotel, reveling in the peace and love I was feeling. I finally had a certainty about who God was – from the lips of God Himself and the confirming historical record of the demonstration of His love on the cross during His sojourn on the earth! He was a God who took on human flesh and died a torturous death in order to take upon Himself the punishment of those who were at enmity with Him. It was mind blowing!

Homeward Bound

Once I returned to Los Angeles, I wasn't sure what to do next. First of all, I was completely broke. Yet although I didn't have the money to move anywhere else, I certainly couldn't stay in the ashram. I decided not to do anything for a while, acting as if nothing had happened until I could figure out a strategy. Already, however, I was preparing a lengthy letter to all the Guru's premies. The finished letter was ten pages long, typed front and back, single-spaced. In no uncertain terms, I spelled out for them how and why I knew that Maharaj Ji was a phony. As I read and reread it, I thought it was a masterpiece.

In the meantime, I decided it would be wise to appear at satsang, in case I had fallen under suspicion. As far as everybody knew, I had just returned from a blissful trip to see Maharaj Ji in Rome. So, just a week after my return, I made my way into the Loyola Theatre in

Westchester (near LAX) with great trepidation. It was a large, old-fashioned movie house with red-carpeted aisles and stuffed, red velvet seats that folded backward. An actual stage still graced the front of the auditorium, and the movie screen was hidden behind red velvet curtains. A lone microphone stood on the left side of the stage, awaiting testimonials. Fear fluttered inside me. I knew intuitively that someone was going to ask me to give satsang.

There was no way I could speak that night. For one thing, I was incapable of articulating what had happened to me. Knowing what I did about the cult, I actually feared being physically attacked and bodily thrown out if I stood before the audience and announced that the Guru was a fraud. Yet at the same time, I knew that eventually I had to tell them. They were being deceived and I wanted to let them know. Some of them really mattered to me.

I had intentionally arrived late and slipped silently into the very back of the mezzanine section of seats. I was clinging to the hope that I wouldn't be noticed. Someone was watching for me, however. I'd been seated there only about 20 minutes when the young woman at the microphone called for me to come forward. I slid more deeply into my chair, hoping to look unwell. I'd noticed before that, occasionally, someone didn't respond to the request to speak. And, thankfully, after an agonizing minute or two, she called on someone else.

Later that night at our ashram a few of the guys began to question me about my trip. Why hadn't I gone to see Guru Maharaj Ji in Rome like I'd said I would? Why had I gone to Israel of all places? Did I think it was permissible for an ashram premie to simply go off on a vacation trip? Weren't we supposed to be working hard together?

I tried to explain my concerns, first to them and later to my roommate. I was as honest as possible about my doubts. But as it turned out, my sincerity didn't help me much. The trip to Israel, combined with my growing skepticism about Maharaj Ji, were bright red flags in the face of the cult's leadership. My days at the ashram

were clearly numbered.

Fortunately, my friend Shirley agreed to take me in. She was a lesbian psychologist who shared a house with a homosexual ballet dancer. They had been my friends for years, and they graciously made their basement apartment available for my use during this crisis.

And it wasn't long until I needed it. Sooner than I expected, the ashram informed me that because I no longer fully believed in Guru Maharaj Ji, I would have to leave. The cult's spokespeople were unbending, unkind and impatient. I told them that I would be out within a few days. It was sobering how these so-called brothers, who allegedly loved me devotedly, had no problem whatsoever kicking me out into the street without a word of consideration for my well being.

I thankfully moved into Shirley's basement. By now, I was confidant that God was with me, and that He and I could handle anything. But doubts soon gathered. Shirley was into some sort of angel worship, and as I was kneeling beside my bed each night, I'd hear her angel-worship music moaning through my ceiling – an eerie, mournful sound. "Lord," I prayed silently, "are you *sure* you want me here? After all, they're homosexuals and angel worshippers! Shouldn't I be in a healthier climate?"

One day I decided to walk the two blocks down to Hollywood Presbyterian Church, thinking to myself, "Even though they're almost certainly a bunch of hypocrites, I can still worship God there." To my utter surprise, the church was spilling over with born-again believers who really seemed to care about me. I had never run into that before and was quite taken by it. Paul Cedar was the associate pastor and he was preaching all that month. To my astonishment, each Sunday his sermon answered the primary question that I'd put before God in prayer that very week. It was a marvelous example of the Lord's detailed concern for me. He was there and He was listening.

A week after being ejected from the ashram, I stood outside the old satsang hall distributing my letter to the premies. At first they

probably assumed that I wanted to repent. But instead of going in, I stood outside and handed my 10-page document to every person that passed. Within a few minutes, one of the leaders came out and asked me to come inside so they could talk to me about the statements I had made.

Now more than ever I mistrusted them and refused to go with them. They ordered me off the property under threat of arrest. I refused, pointing out that I was standing on a public sidewalk. They stood next to me, warning people not to accept or read my paper. I pretended to leave, but instead went to the parking lot and starting putting my letter under windshield-wipers. The cultists eventually spotted me and starting ripping the paper off the cars. I responded by slipping copies through partially opened windows. Finally the disgusted cultists left, and I learned later on that they had urgently warned the Guru's following not to read a word of what I had written. I fervently hoped that this ban would stimulate interest all the more.

Once I'd handed out every last copy of the letter, I left and never returned.

The next morning at my office, Jeff was ecstatic. For the entire day, his big smile never seemed to fade. And it wasn't a gloating smile, either. He was overflowing with sheer love and joy for me. He listened carefully to my story. And he promised to share the details with every one who had prayed for me.

I'd sent my parents a postcard from Israel, so they were more or less aware that something good was going on. Since that day at the beach, God had given my mother an assurance that I was going to leave the cult. Now, with all these changes behind me, I decided it was time to go see my parents. But I gave them no warning, and arrived entirely unannounced.

I got to their house just as Mom was leaving to go to church -- dad had gone on ahead. As I walked up the driveway, Mom could tell right away something had changed. As she studied my face she could

clearly see that the old David had died, and a new one had been born. I told her a very short version of my visit to Israel. I explained how my thinking had changed on the trip and then presented her with an olive wood Last Supper sculpture that I'd bought in Jerusalem.

After this rather brief exchange, I rode with Mom to White Clay Creek Presbyterian Church in Newark, Delaware. Mom found Dad and told him someone was there to see him. Just as he walked out of the building, I headed up the steps.

"Hello, I'm Phil Foster." He introduced himself to me, extending his hand. He didn't even recognize me.

"Hello," I said quietly, "I'm your son David."

Dad looked both stunned and extremely embarrassed. I moved past his extended hand and gave him a hug.

For the first time since I was a small child, I gave my dad a real, honest-to-goodness hug.

In one important way, I was home.

But in another, my journey had just begun.

* * * *

You can read David Kyle Foster's entire life story - *Love Hunger* - by going to: https://www.masteringlife.org/shop/store/books/love-hunger-a-harrowing-journey-from-sexual-addiction-to-true-fulfillment-by-david-kyle-foster-detail

Dr. David Kyle Foster *is the founder of Mastering Life Ministries (*https://www.masteringlife.org*) and the author of Transformed Into His Image and Love Hunger. Read his definitive work on sexual sin and brokenness in his newest book, The Sexual Healing Reference Edition and listen to his twice-weekly podcast at:* charismapodcastnetwork.com/show/purepassion. To find him online, go to: http://

www.MasteringLife.org.

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